

Division of Consumer Affairs

## News Release

### **New Phone Services, "Try It, Before You Buy It."**

#### **Consumer Alert**

December 11, 1996

BellSouth has made available to consumers three new services which can be accessed without subscribing to them. The new services are three-way calling, call return and repeat dialing. Although these services were automatically placed on telephone lines to give consumers the option to "try it before you buy it," consumers should be cautious! The Tennessee regulatory Authority (TRA), which oversees the rates and services of BellSouth, has received several consumer complaints regarding three-way service. These complaints confirm that consumers have been charged .75 on their telephone bill for this service without their knowledge. These consumers were surprised to learn that three-way calling can be activated without their knowledge or consent, and can be costly. How does it happen? The problem can occur when making back-to-back telephone calls. For example, if a consumer doesn't pause at least five seconds between making telephone calls, the telephone network may accidentally activate three-way calling and bill the consumer .75 per occurrence. In a report provided to the TRA, BellSouth acknowledges that this service has had problems but states that they have provided adjustments whenever the charges for the charges are disputed by the consumer. BellSouth has further acknowledged that they have given approximately \$450,000 in adjustments to Tennesseans for disputed three-way calling charges.

The TRA offers two major tips to avoid being charged for three-way calling service: 1. Call BellSouth at 1-800-366-3355 to request "free" blocking of three-way service. This will prevent the ability to automatically activate the service from your telephone. 2. After finishing one telephone call always be sure to hold the switch hook down for at least five seconds before dialing another telephone number. Additionally, the TRA suggests that consumers thoroughly review their telephone bill each month for any unfamiliar or disputed charges. The disputed charges should be reported immediately to the telephone company.

"BellSouth has been most cooperative in working with us and the consumer in getting the problem with three-way calling corrected," reported Lynn Greer, Chairman of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority. BellSouth has reported to the TRA that they are in the process of modifying their network to prevent the inadvertent billing for three-way calling; but, the process to make all the changes statewide will take several months. In the meantime, consumers should call BellSouth at 1-800-366-3355 to request adjustments or obtain free blocking. Or, you may contact the Tennessee Regulatory Authority at 1-800-342-8359 for further assistance.

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